

~~SECRET~~WORST CASE STRATEGIES FOR LEBANONBackground:


Our stated objectives in Lebanon have consistently been:

- restoring the sovereignty of the government of Lebanon throughout its territory;
- obtaining the withdrawal of all foreign forces;
- ensuring the security of Lebanon's borders especially the northern border of Israel.

Ambassador McFarlane's recent cable on this subject underscores the point that we may be at a watershed in our efforts to promote U.S. objectives in Lebanon. The problem simply put is apparent Syrian determination to impede the process of national reconciliation, maintain a zone of influence in Lebanon and force the withdrawal of the multi-national peacekeeping forces in Beirut. Our efforts to date including measures to augment our offshore presence and to undertake a more aggressive self-defense of our MNF contingent may not have persuaded the SARG that we are prepared to confront Syria directly in furtherance of our stated objectives and in our support of the GOL. Furthermore, the precipitous Israeli withdrawal to the Awwali River--owing largely to domestic political pressure and the refusal of the GOL to implement the Lebanon-Israel agreement--may have encouraged the SARG to pursue its objectives in Lebanon in a manner that does not cross redrawn Israeli "red lines" and thereby incur serious risk of Israeli reprisals.

The Core Problem:

If McFarlane's analysis is correct, we have stark choices to make. In short:

- Retain our stated objectives and escalate our involvement in the Lebanon problem, politically and militarily, to bring an early and positive change in Syrian behavior.
 - Retain our stated objectives but disengage from the active effort to promote national reconciliation and restore Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of Syrian intransigence. At the same time, work in other arenas to encourage international and Arab opprobrium for Syrian behavior.
 - Modify our objectives for Lebanon and realign our strategy to what is feasible and doable without incurring the risk of a direct confrontation with Syria.
- 

The first option obviously entails a high risk of military confrontation with Syria and a serious crisis in U.S.-Soviet relations. It also entails a clear prospect for worsened U.S.

~~SECRET~~

SECRET

SECRET

2

relations with certain other Arab countries, although the reaction of moderate Arab powers will depend fundamentally on the degree of pressure which is ultimately needed to force a change in Syrian behavior. To mitigate the adverse reactions from the Arab world, McFarlane stipulates the need for prior assurances of support from the key Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia. Given traditional Arab concern for U.S.-Israeli collusion, McFarlane has made a multilateral approach by the U.S., France, Italy, and the UK an indispensable condition for a strategy of escalating pressure on Syria.

The second option leaves open the question of what we would do with the MNF in the face of continued Syrian (surrogate) pressure to force its withdrawal. We could buy time and reduce the risk of casualties by continuing a policy of aggressive self-defense although the question of how we treat the provisions of the War Powers Resolution might eventually require the withdrawal of the USMNF. The most significant risk if we choose this option is a serious erosion of U.S. credibility in the Middle East and beyond. There is also some possibility that the tentative policy implicit in this choice will lead to an expanded civil war which culminates in a defacto partition of Lebanon into Muslim, Druze, and Christian entities and Syrian and Israeli spheres of influence.

The third option is in reality a grouping for a variety of sub-options. For example, we could settle for a partitioned Lebanon and cut our losses by actively supporting a new political entity comprised of Greater Beirut and the Maronite heartland. Depending on the success of our efforts with the LAF, there might be some possibility that the dominantly Shia districts in southern Lebanon could ultimately be incorporated into such a Lebanese entity, if Israel was persuaded that security of her border could be assured. The common denominator in these sub-options is acceptance of a Syrian zone of influence in the areas currently occupied by the Syrian Army in addition to the Alayh and Shouf Districts. The precise role of the MNF in the various possibilities grouped under this option is not clear. However, provided the Syrians acquiesced in a partition of the type discussed above, there is a good possibility that U.S. forces could be withdrawn as the situation on the ground stabilized-- although we might continue a residual training and support effort for the LAF. As true with the second option, this option could also lead to an erosion in U.S. credibility.

SECRET

SECRET

SECRET

SECRET

3

The Press of Time:

McFarlane's cables stress that the situation in Alayh and the Shouf is very fluid and that the trends are adverse (massacres, continued shelling, presence of PLO, etc.). While we would ideally prefer more time to thoroughly study and sort through the costs and benefits which attend these options (especially the first one), we need to act promptly, if we decide to continue with our present objectives.

Elements of McFarlane's Recommended Strategy

The critical element is a multilateral approach to Syria which for simplicity's sake would be limited to objectives which are ostensibly shared already. The immediate objectives of this collective strategy would be:

- an immediate ceasefire in place
- minor LAF redeployments within Beirut
- commencement of an immediate process of withdrawing all foreign forces to be completed by a date certain
- restoration of Lebanese sovereignty in areas evacuated via a gradual extension of the LAF presence.

The approach would feature common determination to restore Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity supported by a demonstrated willingness to halt Syrian interference by MNF deployments to "strategic locations" adjacent to Syrian positions. Our chances for persuading the other MNF countries to join in this approach will be enhanced if we describe the alternatives as we see them. In the final analysis, they must be made to see that a coordinated multilateral approach to Syria is the only alternative to the partition of Lebanon and the failure of our respective efforts thus far.

Inasmuch as the objectives are already included in the "Bandar Plan," we might expect Saudi (and other moderate Arab) support for this multilateral approach although the "muscle" would have to be provided by the MNF countries. The recent crisis in Saudi-Syrian relations owing to Syrian rejection of Bandar's four elements, provides us with an opportunity to capitalize on Saudi frustration, if we move quickly before possible Syrian counterpressure can be brought to bear and the Saudis back away from their commitment to Gemayel.

SECRET

SECRET